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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 736  
INFO GULF WAR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 1907

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR  
TAGS: PREL IZ IR MOPS  
SUBJECT: IRAQI AIR FORCE BOMBS TEHRAN REFINERY

¶1. (U) AS REPORTED THE RAQI AIR FORCE HAS BOMBED THE TEHRAN OIL REFINERY MAY 7. MILITARY COMMUNIQUE 2216 RELEASED MAY 8 SAYS "GROUPS OF AIRCRAFT" FLEW TO TEHRAN AND STRUCK THE CHOSEN TARGETS: THE REFINERY'S MAIN NOTHERN DISTILLING TOWER, AND THE CENTRAL BOILERS AND COOLING TOWER COMPLEX. THZ IRAQI AIR FORCE REPORTEDLY USED AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN IN AUGUST 1982 TO PLAN THE RAID, AND THE LOCAL PAPERS MAY 8 PRINT THESE PICTURES SIDE BY SIDE WITH PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE RECENT DESTRUCTION. TAKEN FROM AN ANGLE (DIRECTLY OVERHEAD), ALL THAT IS DISCERNIBLE ARE TWO COLUMNS OF BILLOWING BLACK SMOKE; IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO DETERMINE WHAT WAS AND WASNOT HIT.

¶2. (U) IN A MESSAGE TO THE PRESIDENT, AIR FORCE COMMANDER HAMID SHABAN BOASTED THAT THE BOMBING WAS "THE FIRST OPERATION OF THIS TYPE IN ARAB HISTORY," BUT DID NOT ELABORATE. HE DECCARED THE AIR FORCE READY TO STRIKE THE IRANIANS WHERE AND WHEN THE PRESIDENT CHOOSES.

¶3. (U) WE NOTE WIRE SERVICE REPORTS FROM TEHRAN THAT INDICATE ONLY ONE BOMB WAS DROPPED, AND THAT ON A TANK FARM. IRAQI NEWSPAPERS, CONVERSELY, ARE CLAIMING "THE REFINERY WAS REDUCED TO ASHES" (BAGHDAD OBSERVER), "THE REFINERY IS NOW DEBRIS AND WRECKAGE" (QADISIYA), OR SIMPLY "DESTROYSD" (THAWRA).

¶4. (C) COMMENT: THIS ATTACK IS IN LINE WITH RECENT STATEMENTS BY THE PRESIDENT AND THE AIR FORCE COMMANDER THAT IRAQ INTENDS TO TAKE THE WAR TO THE ENEMY. AFTER A SIMILAR STRIKE AT THE ISFAHAN REFINERY MARCH 13 THE IRAQI MEDIA ALSO MADE SWEEPING CLAIMS, ALTHOUGH ULTIMATELY THE RAID WAS SHOWN TO BE LESS THAN EFFECTIVE. THIS AGAIN MAY BE THE CASE. WE CANNOT DISCERN EXACTLY WHAT SHABAN WAS REFERRING TO IN HIS COMMENT TO THE PRESIDENT, OTHER THAN, PERHAPS, MID-AIR RE-FUELING OF THE ATTACK AIRCRAFT. WHAT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IS WHETHER THE IRAQIS FOLLOW THIS RAID UP WITH FURTHER STRIKES AGAINST REFINERIES OR OTHER INSTALLATIONS IN OR ADJACENT TO TEHRAN. MOST LIKELY THE RAID IS MEANT TO GIVE THE IRAQI PUBLIC A PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST, SINCE THE IRAQIS CONSISTENTLY FAIL TO EMPLOY THE AIR FORCE IN A SUSTAINED MANNER AGAINST STRATEGIC ECONOMIC TARGETS. THE IRANIANS ARE UNLIKELY TO RETALIATE IN KIND FOR THIS ONE STRIKE, BUT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE TO HIT BAGHDAD IF THE IRAQIS KEEP IT UP. THE IRAQI LEADERSHIP WILL BE WARY OF INSTIGATING A POLICY OF STRIKES AT TEHRAN, SINCE THE CONSEQUENCE SURELY WILL BE A SPATE OF DEMORALIZING SCUD MISSLE ATTACKS ON BAGHDAD.

NEWTON